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ABSTRACT

This digest looks at research findings and instructional applications concerning lesson structure for teacher directed initial instruction of mildly handicapped students. Research has identified seven critical elements of teaching method: gain the learner's attention, review relevant past learning, communicate the goal of the lesson, model the skill to be learned, prompt for correct response, check for skill mastery, and close the lesson. Specific findings and suggestions for implementation are provided for each of the elements. Twenty-one references and/or resources are listed. (DB)

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RESEARCH TO PRACTICE:

LESSON STRUCTURE

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RESEARCH FINDINGS

Teacher effectiveness studies have identified a number of critical components of a lesson for initial instruction. For mildly handicapped students, seven elements of a teacher-directed lesson are included: attention, review, goal, model, prompt, check, and close.

GAIN THE LEARNER'S ATTENTION

Gaining the attention of mildly handicapped students is critical for influencing student achievement. The teacher's task is to direct selective attention to the relevant activity. Indeed, a satisfactory criterion for maintaining student involvement in teacher-directed activities is 90% task engagement.

Attention can be gained by using verbal prompting such as "Look here," "Listen," "Let's begin," followed by a pause. Teachers need to monitor to ensure that students are attending.

REVIEW RELEVANT PAST LEARNING

Learning is optimal when students can establish a link between new information and what they already know. Review can take the form of guiding students in connecting independent work or homework. Teachers can systematically review prerequisite skills for the lesson. For example, when two-digit division is being taught, one-digit division should be reviewed.

COMMUNICATE THE GOAL OF THE LESSON

Low-achieving students learn best when teachers make reference to what is being learned, why it is important, and if appropriate, how it relates to other learning.

The goal should be stated briefly. If appropriate, the students should also be told the relevance of the specific skill or activity. For example: "Today we are going to learn to proofread our work. We want to learn to proofread in order to catch careless errors."

MODEL THE SKILL TO BE LEARNED

Effective teachers demonstrate the skill prior to eliciting student responses. High student success rates are seen in classrooms where instruction proceeds in small steps that are not too difficult.

When modeling, the demonstration should be very clear. Steps should be exaggerated so the students will attend to the critical features. When a complex skill is being taught, it is important to ask questions of students to verify their understanding and increase their attention. Steps need to proceed in small increments, with explicit directions. The model may need to be repeated several times.

PROMPT FOR CORRECT RESPONSE

Effective teaching includes guided practice with prompts and feedback. Optimal learning is created by preventing incorrect responses and eliciting as many correct responses as possible.

With mildly handicapped students, prompted practice is continued until students have demonstrated a very high level of proficiency.

Prompting can be accomplished by having teacher and student do the behavior at the same time, such as: "Read the word with me." Student and teacher can simultaneously observe each other.

With higher level skills, prompting can also be done by verbal cues as the student performs behaviors.

For example:

Teacher: Read this problem.
Student: 34 plus 9.
Teacher: What column do we add first?
Student: The one's column.
Teacher: Read the one's column.
Student: 4 plus 9.
Teacher: What is 4 plus 9? (Pause)
Student: 13, etc.

CHECK FOR SKILL MASTERY

When students have demonstrated proficiency in performing the behavior, they then perform the behavior under supervision with no prompting.

During unprompted practice, the response needs to be monitored carefully. Feedback must be provided after every item and continued until students are consistently responding correctly. The teacher provides a number of successful repetitions.

CLOSE THE LESSON

A definite closure to the lesson is needed for mildly handicapped students. This close can be accomplished by reviewing the skill, discussing what will be covered in the next lesson, or introducing independent work or homework.

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